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Deir el-Medina

Love is a powerful emotion that drives people to take crazy actions. Today, particularly in popular media, hundreds of different interpretations of this potent emotion, both positive and negative, have been expressed. However, the focus on love is not a new concept. In several ancient societies, texts have been found showing people's interpretations of love. These interpretations show the clear societal differences between men and women of ancient time periods. One society that expressed the intense emotion of love while inadvertently showing the attitudinal differences between the genders was Deir el Medina, an Ancient Egyptian city made exclusively for the families of tomb builders and decorators. Although all of the poems found in Deir el Medina are about love, the male speakers focus more on the physicality of their lovers, while the females focus more on the complications that love creates in regards to societal expectations.

Throughout the poems, both male and female speakers are obsessed with the concept of love and portray its effects through an extended metaphor that compares love to a feeling of sickness. Almost all of the speakers in the poems talk about how obsessed they are with the people that they love. For example, in the poem "My Brother Torments My Heart," the female speaker writes, "I am possessed by my love for him." Her choice of words shows how strongly the experience of love takes control of her feelings. The word "possessed" strongly supports the

theme of the obsession of love. The idea that love possesses humanity is shown throughout many other poems as well. This idea shows that Ancient Egyptians, especially those living in Deir el-Medina, viewed the concept of love as a powerful emotional force. The fact that the love possessed them shows that they were more obsessed with the concept of love more than they were with the people they loved. Also, the speakers compare love to a feeling of sickness throughout many of the poems. For example, the entire poem "Sickness Invaded Me" is about how the speaker feels sick because of his love for a woman. For example, in the poem he says, "I am heavy in all my limbs, my body has forsaken me," showing the feeling of sickness that the speaker has when describing his love for the woman. Throughout many of the poems, the speakers use a metaphor of sickness to describe their love, showing a common belief that the people of Deir el Medina had- not being with a lover results in a feeling of sickness. To "cure" this sickness, one would have to successfully court the one they love. The repeated uses of possession and sickness throughout the poems show how both men and women in Deir el-Medina had an obsessive passion towards the idea of love.

The male speakers seem to focus mainly on the physical features of the women that they love. In the poem "The Sister Without Peer," the speaker writes, "She looks like the rising morning star." The male speaker compares the woman he loves to the "rising morning star" or in other words, the sun. In modern day, this comparison would seem like a normal romantic line in a poem, but in Ancient Egyptian culture, the sun was a very important object. To them, it was more than just a star, it was a religious object, symbolizing the head of all gods, Ra. By comparing the woman's looks to the highest deity in Ancient Egyptian culture, the speaker makes it clear how important the woman's looks are to him. Similarly, in the poem "I Wish I Were Her Laundryman," the author says, "Thank God for the body, its youthful vigor!" Here, the

author expresses his gratitude to God for making the female body in a certain way. Many of the poems narrated by a male speaker share this common theme of focusing on the body of women over anything else, showing how important sensual gratification was to the men. The poems with male speakers exhibit the intense desire that men had for the bodies of women in Ancient Egyptian society.

On the other hand, the female speakers in the poems portray the impact that societal expectations had on their love. In the poem “My Brother Torments My Heart,” the female speaker expresses to the man she loves that her family will praise him when she says, “My people will hail you all together, They will hail you, O my brother.” Similarly, much of this poem talks about what other people would think of the speaker and her lover being together. Because of the emphasis of societal expectations in this poem, the speaker makes it clear that the views of other people were really important to her. Also, in the poem “My Heart Flutters Hastily,” the female speaker says, “Sit still the brother comes to you, and many eyes as well.” The second part of this quote, regarding the eyes, describes what the speaker thinks will happen if she tries too hard to be with the man. She believes that people will look at her in a strange way. In contrast to the attitudes of the male speakers, the female speaker here shows how she worries about what society will think about her, and therefore tells herself to “sit still” and wait for the man to come to her. Overall, as portrayed in the poems, the women in Deir el-Medina were very focused on the societal expectations for women at the time.

All of the poems found in Deir el-Medina show how love was viewed in Ancient Egyptian society as a powerful driving force of human emotion. The speakers express their obsession towards love through the use of language and the metaphors of sickness. Despite these similarities in their view of love, both men and women had many different views as well. The

men of this ancient society seem to focus more on the physical features of the women, while the women of the society worry about their social image. These attitudes towards love can be seen even in today's media. Men are displayed as people who overly sexualize women, while women are portrayed as people who follow others orders. Although these depictions of the genders may not be true, it shows how the concept of men and women have not changed throughout the times.